



July 18, 2005

Mr. John Conforti
N.C. Department of Transportation
Project Development and Environmental
Analysis
1548 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1548

Dear Mr. Conforti:

Thank you for sending us a copy of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) for the U.S. 17 Highway improvements (T.I.P. 4-2514 B, C & D). However, I am distressed to learn that the deadline for comments was February 15, 2005. The Coastal Land Trust is on record as having an interest in this highway project; moreover, Janice Allen, our Director of Land Protection has called repeatedly to ask the status of this plan. We therefore hope that you will accept our comments, even though they are late, since we did not receive the plan until the deadline had passed. Please put us on the mailing list to receive a copy of any subsequent notices regarding this project, and a copy of the Final EIS once completed.

As noted in the Draft EIS, the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust holds a conservation easement over 648.8 acres of the Foscue Plantation in Jones County. This conservation easement has numerous conservation values including scenic, historic, significant wildlife habitat and water quality values. Over three years ago, the Coastal Land Trust expressed concern to the North Carolina Department of Transportation about any proposed routes that bisect the heart of the Foscue Plantation, which we consider to be the land to the east of present U.S. Highway 17 (see 7/2/2002 letter to Mr. Roger Sheats.). Thus, we oppose Alternatives 4B and 4G as identified in the Draft EIS which would go through the Foscue Plantation near the old Seaboard Line Railroad bed. We understand the Federal Highway Administration must attempt to avoid any historic Section 4F property if possible and we appreciate that this is a difficult task in the overall project area considering the number of historic sites. However, we urge the Department of Transportation to drop Alternatives 4B and 4G which essentially cut off the historic main house from the remaining portion of the property along the Trent River. In our opinion, these alternatives would have the greatest impact on the conservation values of the Foscue Plantation easement.